

**Massachusetts Recreational Trails Advisory Committee**  
**MINUTES**  
**October 8, 2014**

**Location:** 578 Merriam Avenue, Leominster MA

**Time:** 4pm to 6pm

**Members Present:**

Bill Boles: Mountain Biking

Benton Phelps: ATV

Becky Kalagher: Equestrian

Larry Tucker: Snowmobiles

Dick O'Brien: Community Trail and Greenways

Dick Williamson: Rail Trails

Pam Browning: Paddling

Michele Biscoe: Dog-walking

Heather Clish: Hiking

Michele Biscoe: Dog-Walking

Amanda Lewis: Recreational Trails Program Coordinator, DCR

Paul Jahnige: Greenways and Trails Director, DCR

**Alternates Present:**

A. Richard Miller: Rail Trails

Leslie Robinson: Dog-Walking

**Letter to DCR from MARTAB: Trail Policies on Watershed Lands**

- Bill Boles has drafted and proposes that MARTAB send a letter to DCR in response to certain activities and communications that have taken place between DCR Watershed Protection Director, Jonathon Yeo and the mountain biking community, in particular NEMBA (New England Mountain Biking Association).
- Issue Background: The Unified Trail Policy that was developed by DCR in 1990 states that mountain bikes are prohibited from recreating on watershed lands except on designated trails. It is now 25 years later and mountain bikers, equestrians and hikers are utilizing trails everywhere that signs do not say otherwise, and sometimes where they do. The Ware River Watershed has decided to enforce the existing rules that state that no activities can take place off of roads, rail trails or recognized trails on watershed lands. Since there are no real, known trail policies for watershed lands, or a map of the trails that are actually on the ground, people have gone wherever they think there is a trail. NEMBA is pushing to look at if the rules are appropriate while also looking to shut down trails that are harmful to the natural resources.
- Letter from MARTAB to DCR: the draft letter states that DCR policies should be looked at, some trails should be closed and others should remain open to

- mountain bikers, so long as they do not have a negative impact on the resources in the area and the watershed overall.
- Heather pointed out that DCR manages watershed supply land under different oversight than the rest of its properties (MassParks). It has its own advisory committee. Jonathon Yeo is the director and reports to the DCR Commissioner. MWRA buys the water, and the lands therefore are subject to several layers of oversight and rules that maintain assurances of a quality water supply.
  - Each reservoir/watershed has its own public access policy. Ware just updated its policies in 2010, with another update due in 2017. This is where the controversy has been taking place, in terms of mountain bikers being expelled from watershed lands.
  - DEP has a role in public access decisions as well, as it is an unfiltered water supply. DWSP does not want to lose their waiver for filtration, which would be very costly to compensate for (possibly ½ billion dollars).
  - Dick O. suggested that MARTAB request that DWSP review their policies.
  - Paul pointed out that it is valuable to support these regulations and policies, managers are reluctant to allow new trail use and that signage is extensive at access points in the watershed lands.
  - Heather pointed out that there are lots of trails that have been built without permission and that, with three years until new regulations that will require a public process, this is not the best time for MARTAB to make such a request. Should MARTAB ask to change the policy now, or instead to have a role/leadership opportunity when the regulations are due for review and updates? She also pointed out that she has trouble believing that trails in general are a threat to the water supply.
  - Bill suggested that MARTAB begin by recommending an inventory of trails be taken, and trails that are damaged or threaten the watershed be closed immediately. For the past 25 years, he believes there has been no damage from illegal trail use. He recommended that the MARTAB support that the rules that are in effect now should be followed and then recommend that DCR look at the trail system and make decisions about future use, through a public process while looking at data and the facts to help guide decision-making.
  - Heather suggested that MARTAB recommend that DCR address illegal trail use and sustainable design throughout the state, as a more universal approach than just focusing on watershed lands.
  - Michele made a motion to continue to work on the letter and discuss within MARTAB over email communication as a final draft is developed. Larry seconded the motion, unanimous vote in support of the motion.

*Follow-Up: Bill will draft the letter as discussed at the MARTAB meeting and circulate it for comments.*

### **Massachusetts Trail Award Nominations**

- Dick sent out a list of MA Trail Award Nominees to MARTAB, in anticipation of awarding it at the MA Trails Conference. Amanda made a motion to nominate Colleen Abrams as this year's recipient. Dick seconded the motion, unanimous vote in favor.

### **Environmental Bond Bill Update**

- Dick O'Brien recommended that MARTAB should now begin to petition for the release of the bond bill funds, since they are now written into the legislation that has been passed. And, that each MARTAB member, alternate, etc, should also look to their own groups to do the same.

### **MARTAB Upcoming Meetings**

Wednesday, January 14th (7-9pm, Teleconference)

Saturday, February 28<sup>th</sup> (9-5, location TBD) Executive Session

Wednesday, June 17th (4-6pm – location TBD)